



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## THE AMERICAN ELEMENT IN FICTION.

---

CONTEMPORARY criticism will have it that, in order to create an American Literature, we must use American materials. The term "Literature" has, no doubt, come to be employed in a loose sense. The London "Saturday Review" has (or used to have until lately) a monthly two-column article devoted to what is called "American Literature," three-fourths of which were devoted to an examination of volumes of State Histories, Statistical Digests, Records of the Census, and other such works as were never, before or since, suspected of being literature; while the remaining fourth mentioned the titles (occasionally with a line of comment) of whatever productions were at hand in the way of essays, novels, and poetry. This would seem to indicate that we may have—nay, are already possessed of—an American Literature, composed of American materials, provided only that we consent to adopt the "Saturday Review's" conception of what literature is.

Many of us believe, however, that the essays, the novels, and the poetry, as well as the statistical digests, ought to go to the making up of a national literature. It has been discovered, however, that the existence of the former does not depend, to the same extent as that of the latter, upon the employment of exclusively American material. A book about the census, if it be not American, is nothing; but a poem or a romance, though written by a native-born American, who, perhaps, has never crossed the Atlantic, not only may, but frequently does, have nothing in it that can be called essentially American, except its English and, occasionally, its ideas. And the question arises whether such productions can justly be held to form component parts of what shall hereafter be recognized as the literature of America.

How was it with the makers of English literature? Beginning with Chaucer, his "*Canterbury Pilgrims*" is English, both in scene and character; it is even mentioned of the Abbess that "*Frenche of Paris was to her unknowne*"; but his "*Legende of Goode Women*" might, so far as its subject-matter is concerned, have been written by a French, a Spanish, or an Italian Chaucer, just as well as by the British Daniel. Spenser's "*Faerie Queene*" numbers Saint George and King Arthur among its heroes; but its scene is laid in Faerie Lande, if it be laid anywhere, and it is a bare-faced moral allegory throughout. Shakespeare wrote thirty-seven plays, the elimination of which from English literature would undeniably be a serious loss to it; yet, of these plays twenty-three have entirely foreign scenes and characters. Milton, as a political writer, was English; but his "*Paradise Lost and Regained*," his "*Samson*," his "*Ode on the Nativity*," his "*Comus*," bear no reference to the land of his birth. Dryden's best-known work to-day is his "*Alexander's Feast*." Pope has come down to us as the translator of Homer. Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne are the great quartet of English novelists of the last century; but Smollett, in his preface to "*Roderick Random*," after an admiring allusion to the "*Gil Blas*" of Le Sage, goes on to say: "*The following sheets I have modeled on his plan*"; and Sterne was always talking and thinking about Cervantes, and comparing himself to the great Spaniard: "*I think there is more laughable humor, with an equal degree of Cervantic satire, if not more, than in the last*," he writes to "*my witty widow, Mrs. F.*" Many even of Walter Scott's romances are un-English in their elements; and the fame of Shelley, Keats, and Byron rests entirely upon their "*foreign*" work. Coleridge's poetry and philosophy bear no technical stamp of nationality; and, to come down to later times, Carlyle was profoundly imbued with Germanism, while the "*Romola*" of George Eliot and the "*Cloister and the Hearth*" of Charles Reade are by many considered to be the best of their works. In the above hasty enumeration innumerable instances in point are, of course, omitted; but enough have been given, perhaps, to show that imaginative writers have not generally been disowned by their country on the ground that they have availed themselves, in their writings, of other scenes and characters than those of their own immediate neighborhoods.

The statistics of the work of the foremost American writers could easily be shown to be much more strongly imbued with the specific flavor of their environment. Benjamin Franklin, though he was an author before the United States existed, was American to the marrow. The "Leather-Stocking Tales," of Cooper are the American epic. Irving's "Knickerbocker," and his "Woolfert's Roost" will long outlast his other productions. Poe's most popular tale, "The Gold-Bug," is American in its scene, and so is "The Mystery of Marie Roget," in spite of its French nomenclature; and all that he wrote is strongly tinged with the native hue of his strange genius. Longfellow's "Evangeline" and "Hiawatha" and "Miles Standish," and such poems as "The Skeleton in Armor" and "The Building of the Ship," crowd out of sight his graceful translations and adaptations. Emerson is the veritable American eagle of our literature, so that to be Emersonian is to be American. Whittier and Holmes have never looked beyond their native boundaries, and Hawthorne has brought the stern gloom of the Puritan period and the uneasy theorizings of the present day into harmony with the universal and permanent elements of human nature. There was certainly nothing European visible in the crude but vigorous stories of Theodore Winthrop; and Bret Harte, the most brilliant figure among our later men, is not only American, but Californian,—as is, likewise, the Poet of the Sierras. It is not necessary to go any further. Mr. Henry James, having enjoyed early and singular opportunities of studying the effects of the recent annual influx of Americans, cultured and otherwise, into England and the Continent, has very sensibly and effectively, and with exquisite grace of style and pleasantness of thought, made the phenomenon the theme of a remarkable series of novels. Hereupon the cry of an "International School" has been raised, and critics profess to be seriously alarmed lest we should ignore the signal advantages for *mise-en-scene* presented by this western half of the planet, and should enter into vain and unpatriotic competition with foreign writers on their own ground. The truth is, meanwhile, that it would have been a much surer sign of affectation in us to have abstained from literary comment upon the patent and notable fact of this international *rapprochement*,—which is just as characteristic an American trait as the episode of the Argonauts of 1849,—and we have every reason to be grateful to Mr. Henry James, and to his

school, if he has any, for having rescued us from the opprobrium of so foolish a piece of know-nothingism. The phase is, of course, merely temporary; its interest and significance will presently be exhausted; but, because we are American, are we to import no French cakes and English ale? As a matter of fact, we are too timid and self-conscious; and these infirmities imply a much more serious obstacle to the formation of a characteristic literature than does any amount of gadding abroad.

That must be a very shallow literature which depends for its national flavor and character upon its topography and its dialect; and the criticism which can conceive of no deeper Americanism than this is shallower still. What is an American book? It is a book written by an American, and by one who writes as an American, that is, unaffectedly. So an English book is a book written by an unaffected Englishman. What difference can it make what the subject of the writing is? Mr. Henry James lately brought out a volume of essays on "French Poets and Novelists." Mr. E. C. Stedman recently published a series of monographs on "The Victorian Poets." Are these books French and English, or are they nondescript, or are they American? Not only are they American, but they are more essentially American than if they had been disquisitions upon American literature. And the reason is, of course, that they subject the things of the old world to the tests of the new, and thereby vindicate and illustrate the characteristic mission of America to mankind. We are here to hold up European conventionalisms and prejudices in the light of the new day, and thus afford everybody the opportunity, never heretofore enjoyed, of judging them by other standards, and in other surroundings than those amidst which they came into existence. In the same way, Emerson's "English Traits" is an American thing, and it gives categorical reasons why American things should be. And what is an American novel except a novel treating of persons, places, and ideas from an American point of view? The point of view is *the* point, not the thing seen from it.

But it is said that "the great American novel," in order fully to deserve its name, ought to have American scenery. Some thousands of years ago, the Greeks had a novelist—Homer—who evolved the great novel of that epoch; but the scenery of that novel was Trojan, not Greek. The story is a criticism, from a Greek stand-point, of foreign affairs, illustrated

with practical examples; and, as regards treatment, quite as much care is bestowed upon the delineation of Hector, Priam, and Paris, as upon Agamemnon, Menelaus, and Achilles. The same story, told by a Trojan Homer, would doubtless have been very different; but it is by no means certain that it would have been any better told. It embodies, whether symbolically or literally matters not, the triumph of Greek ideas and civilization. But, even so, the sympathies of the reader are not always, or perhaps uniformly, on the conquering side. Homer was doubtless a patriot, but he shows no signs of having been a bigot. He described that great international episode with singular impartiality; what chiefly interested him was the play of human nature. Nevertheless, there is no evidence that the Greeks were backward in admitting his claims as their national poet; and we may legitimately conclude that were an American Homer—whether in prose or poetry—to appear among us, he might pitch his scene where he liked—in Patagonia or on the banks of the Zambezi—and we should accept the situation with perfect equanimity. Only let him be a native of New York, or Boston, or San Francisco, or Mullenville, and be inspired with the American idea, and we ask no more. Whatever he writes will belong to our literature and add luster to it.

One hears many complaints about the snobbishness of running after things European. Go West, young man, these moralists say, or go down Fifth Avenue, and investigate Chatham street, and learn that all the elements of romance, to him who has the seeing eye, lie around your own front doorstep and back yard. But let not these persons forget that he who fears Europe is a less respectable snob than he who studies it. Let us welcome Europe in our books as freely as we do at Castle Garden; we may do so safely. If our digestion be not strong enough to assimilate her, and work up whatever is valuable in her into our own bone and sinew, then America is not the thing we took her for. For what is America? Is it simply a reproduction of one of these Eastern nationalities, which we are so fond of alluding to as effete? Surely not. It is a new departure in history; it is a new door opened to the development of the human race, or, as I should prefer to say, of humanity. We are misled by the chatter of politicians and the bombast of Congress. In the course of ages, the time has at last arrived when man, all over this planet, is entering upon a

new career of moral, intellectual, and political emancipation; and America is the concrete expression and theater of that great fact, as all spiritual truths find their fitting and representative physical incarnation. But what would this huge western continent be, if America—the real America of the mind—had no existence? It would be a body without a soul, and would better, therefore, not be at all. If America is to be a repetition of Europe on a larger scale, it is not worth the pain of governing it. Europe has shown what European ideas can accomplish; and whatever fresh thought or impulse comes to birth in it can be nothing else than an American thought and impulse, and must sooner or later find its way here, and become naturalized with its brethren. Buds and blossoms of America are sprouting forth all over the Old World, and we gather in the fruit. They do not find themselves at home there, but they know where their home is. The old country feels them like thorns in her old flesh, and is gladly rid of them; but such prickings are the only wholesome and hopeful symptoms she presents; if they ceased to trouble her, she would be dead indeed. She has an uneasy experience before her, for a time; but the time will come when she, too, will understand that her ease is her disease, and then Castle Garden may close its doors, for America will be everywhere.

If, then, America is something vastly more than has hitherto been understood by the word nation, it is proper that we attach to that other word, patriotism, a significance broader and loftier than has been conceived till now. By so much as the idea that we represent is great, by so much are we, in comparison with it, inevitably chargeable with littleness and shortcomings. For we are of the same flesh and blood as our neighbors; it is only our opportunities and our responsibilities that are fairer and weightier than theirs. Circumstances afford every excuse to them, but none to us. "*E Pluribus Unum*" is a frivolous motto; our true one should be, "*Noblesse oblige*." But, with a strange perversity, in all matters of comparison between ourselves and others, we display what we are pleased to call our patriotism by an absurd touchiness as to points wherein Europe, with its settled and polished civilization, must needs be our superior; and are quite indifferent about those things by which our real strength is constituted. Can we not be content to learn from Europe the graces, the refinements, the amenities of life,

so long as we are able to teach her life itself? For my part, I never saw in England any appurtenance of civilization, calculated to add to the convenience and commodiousness of existence, that did not seem to me to surpass anything of the kind that we have in this country. Notwithstanding which—and I am far, indeed, from having any pretensions to asceticism—I would have been fairly stifled at the idea of having to spend my life there. No American can live in Europe, unless he means to return home, or unless, at any rate, he returns here in mind, in hope, in belief. For an American to accept England, or any other country, as both a mental and physical finality, would, it seems to me, be tantamount to renouncing his very life. To enjoy English comforts at the cost of adopting English opinions, would be about as pleasant as to have the privilege of retaining one's body on condition of surrendering one's soul, and would, indeed, amount to just about the same thing.

I fail, therefore, to feel any apprehension as to our literature becoming Europeanized, because whatever is American in it must lie deeper than anything European can penetrate. More than that, I believe and hope that our novelists will deal with Europe a great deal more, and a great deal more intelligently, than they have done yet. It is a true and healthy artistic instinct that leads them to do so. Hawthorne—and no American writer had a better right than he to contradict his own argument—says, in the preface to the “Marble Faun,” in a passage that has been often quoted, but will bear repetition :

“Italy, as the site of a romance, was chiefly valuable to him as affording a sort of poetic or fairy precinct, where actualities would not be so terribly insisted on as they are, and must needs be, in America. No author, without a trial, can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy army, nor anything but a commonplace prosperity, in broad and simple daylight, as is happily the case with my dear native land. It will be very long, I trust, before romance writers may find congenial and easily-handled themes, either in the annals of our stalwart Republic, or in any characteristic and probable events of our individual lives. Romance and poetry, ivy, lichens, and wall-flowers need ruin to make them grow.”

Now, what is to be understood from this passage? It assumes, in the first place, that a work of art, in order to be effective, must contain profound contrasts of light and shadow; and then it points out that the shadow, at least, is found ready to the

hand in Europe. There is no hint of patriotic scruples as to availing one's self of such a "picturesque and gloomy" background; if it is to be had, then let it be taken; the main object to be considered is the work of art. Europe, in short, afforded an excellent quarry, from which, in Hawthorne's opinion, the American novelist might obtain materials which are conspicuously deficient in his own country, and which that country is all the better for not possessing. In "*Marble Faun*" the author had conceived a certain idea, and he considered that he had been not unsuccessful in realizing it. The subject was new, and full of especial attractions to his genius, and it would manifestly have been impossible to adapt it to an American setting. There was one drawback connected with it, and this Hawthorne did not fail to recognize. He remarks in the preface that he had "lived too long abroad not to be aware that a foreigner seldom acquires that knowledge of a country at once flexible and profound, which may justify him in endeavoring to idealize its traits." But he was careful not to attempt "a portraiture of Italian manners and character." He made use of the Italian scenery and atmosphere just so far as was essential to the development of his idea, and consistent with the extent of his Italian knowledge; and, for the rest, fell back upon American characters and principles. The result has been long enough before the world to have met with a proper appreciation. I have heard regret expressed that the power employed by the author in working out this story had not been applied to a romance dealing with a purely American subject. But to analyze this objection is to dispose of it. A man of genius is not, commonly, enfeebled by his own productions; and, physical accidents aside, Hawthorne was just as capable of writing another "*Scarlet Letter*" after the "*Marble Faun*" was published, as he had been before. Meanwhile, few will deny that our literature would be a loser had the "*Marble Faun*" never been written.

The drawback above alluded to is, however, not to be underrated. It may operate in two ways. In the first place, the American's European observations may be inaccurate. As a child, looking at a sphere, might suppose it to be a flat disk, shaded at one side and lighted at the other, so a sight-seer in Europe may ascribe to what he beholds qualities and a character quite at variance with what a more fundamental knowledge would have enabled him to perceive. In the second place, the

stranger in a strange land, be he as accurate as he may, will always tend to look at what is around him objectively, instead of allowing it subjectively—or, as it were, unconsciously—to color his narrative. He will be more apt directly to describe what he sees, than to convey the feeling or aroma of it without description. It would doubtless, for instance, be possible for Mr. Henry James to write an “English” or even a “French” novel without falling into a single technical error; but it is no less certain that a native writer, of equal ability, would treat the same subject in a very different manner. Mr. James’s version might contain a great deal more of definite information; but the native work would insinuate an impression which both comes from and goes to a greater depth of apprehension.

But, on the other hand, it is not contended that any American should write an “English” or anything but an “American” novel. The contention is, simply, that he should not refrain from using foreign material, when it happens to suit his exigencies, merely because it is foreign. Objective writing may be quite as good reading as subjective writing, in its proper place and function. In fiction, no more than elsewhere, may a writer pretend to be what he is not, or to know what he knows not. When he finds himself abroad, he must frankly admit his situation; and more will not then be required of him than he is fairly competent to afford. It will seldom happen, as Hawthorne intimates, that he can successfully reproduce the inner workings and philosophy of European social and political customs and peculiarities; but he can give a picture of the scenery as vivid as can the aborigine, or more so; he can make an accurate study of personal native character; and, finally, and most important of all, he can make use of the conditions of European civilization in events, incidents, and situations which would be impossible on this side of the water. The restrictions, the traditions, the law, and the license of those old countries are full of suggestions to the student of character and circumstances, and supply him with colors and effects that he would else search for in vain. For the truth may as well be admitted; we are at a distinct disadvantage, in America, in respect of the materials of romance. Not that vigorous, pathetic, striking stories may not be constructed here; and there is humor enough, the humor of dialect, of incongruity of character; but, so far as the story depends for its effect, not upon psychical and personal, but upon physical

and general events and situations, we soon feel the limit of our resources. An analysis of the human soul, such as may be found in the "House of the Seven Gables," for instance, is absolute in its interest, apart from outward conditions. But such an analysis cannot be carried on, so to say, *in vacuo*. You must have solid ground to stand on; you must have fitting circumstances, background, and perspective. The ruin of a soul, the tragedy of a heart, demand, as a necessity of harmony and picturesque effect, a corresponding and conspiring environment and stage—just as, in music, the air in the treble is supported and reverberated by the bass accompaniment. The immediate, contemporary act or predicament loses more than half its meaning and impressiveness if it be reëchoed from no sounding-board in the past—its notes, however sweetly and truly touched, fall flatly on the ear. The deeper we attempt to pitch the key of an American story, therefore, the more difficulty shall we find in providing a congruous setting for it; and it is interesting to note how the masters of the craft have met the difficulty. In the "Seven Gables"—and I take leave to say, that if I draw illustrations from this particular writer, it is for no other reason than that he presents, more forcibly than most, a method of dealing with the special problem we are considering—Hawthorne, with the intuitive skill of genius, evolves a background, and produces a reverberation, from materials which he may be said to have created almost as much as discovered. The idea of a house, founded two hundred years ago upon a crime, remaining ever since in possession of its original owners, and becoming the theater, at last, of the judgment upon that crime, is a thoroughly picturesque idea, but it is thoroughly un-American. Such a thing might conceivably occur, but nothing in this country could well be more unlikely. No one before Hawthorne had ever thought of attempting such a thing; at all events, no one else, before or since, has accomplished it. The preface to the romance in question reveals the principle upon which its author worked, and incidentally gives a new definition of the term "romance,"—a definition of which, thus far, no one but its propounder has known how to avail himself. It amounts, in fact, to an acknowledgment that it is impossible to write a "novel" of American life that shall be at once artistic, realistic, and profound. A novel, he says, aims at a "very minute fidelity, not merely to the possible, but to the probable and ordinary course of man's

experience." A romance, on the other hand, "while, as a work of art, it must rigidly subject itself to laws, and while it sins unpardonably so far as it may swerve aside from the truth of the human heart, has fairly a right to pervert that truth under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation. If he think fit, also, he may so manage his atmospheric medium as to bring out and mellow the lights, and deepen and enrich the shadows, of the picture." This is good advice, no doubt; but it reminds one of the renowned physician advising the poor patient: "All you need is to enjoy yourself thoroughly, to see only pleasant people and places, and to live upon the fat of the land." The patient acknowledges the soundness of the counsel, but he has not the means of following it. We can all understand, however, that the difficulties would be greatly lessened could we but command backgrounds of the European order. Thackeray, the Brontës, George Eliot, and others have written great stories, which were not obliged to be romances, because the literal conditions of life in England have a picturesqueness and a depth which correspond well enough with whatever moral and mental vision we may project upon them. Hawthorne was forced to use the scenery and capabilities of his native town of Salem. He saw that he could not present these in a realistic light, and his artistic instinct showed him that he must modify or veil the realism of his figures in the same degree and manner as that of his accessories. No doubt, his peculiar genius and temperament eminently qualified him to produce this magical change; it was a remarkable instance of the spontaneous marriage, so to speak, of the means to the end; and even when, in Italy, he had an opportunity to write a story which should be accurate in fact, as well as faithful to "the truth of the human heart," he still preferred a subject which bore to the Italian environment the same relation that the "House of the Seven Gables" and the "Scarlet Letter" do to the American one; in other words, the conception of Donatello is removed from literal realism as much further than Clifford or Hester Prynne as the inherent romance of the Italian setting is above that of New England. The whole thing is advanced a step further toward pure idealism, the relative proportions being maintained.

"The Blithedale Romance" is only another instance in point, and here, as before, we find the principle admirably stated in the

preface. "In the old countries," says Hawthorne, "a novelist's work is not put exactly side by side with nature; and he is allowed a license with regard to every-day probability, in view of the improved effects he is bound to produce thereby. Among ourselves, on the contrary, there is as yet no Faery Land, so like the real world that, in a suitable remoteness, we cannot well tell the difference, but with an atmosphere of strange enchantment, beheld through which the inhabitants have a propriety of their own. This atmosphere is what the American romancer needs. In its absence, the beings of his imagination are compelled to show themselves in the same category as actually living mortals; a necessity that renders the paint and paste-board of their composition but too painfully discernible." Accordingly, Hawthorne selects the Brook Farm episode (or a reflection of it) as affording his drama "a theater, a little removed from the highway of ordinary travel, where the creatures of his brain may play their phantasmagorical antics, without exposing them to too close a comparison with the actual events of real lives." In this case, therefore, an exceptional circumstance is made to answer the same purpose that was attained by different means in the other romances.

But in what manner have our other writers of fiction treated the difficulties that were thus dealt with by Hawthorne?—Herman Melville cannot be instanced here; for his only novel or romance, whichever it be, was also the most impossible of all his books, and really a terrible example of the enormities which a man of genius may perpetrate when working in a direction unsuited to him. I refer, of course, to "Pierre, or the Ambiguities." Oliver Wendell Holmes's two delightful stories are as favorable examples of what can be done, in the way of an American novel, by a wise, witty, and learned gentleman, as we are likely to see. Nevertheless, one cannot avoid the feeling that they are the work of a man who has achieved success, and found recognition in other ways than by stories, or even poems and essays. The interest, in either book, centers round one of those physiological phenomena which impinge so strangely upon the domain of the soul; for the rest, they are simply accurate and humorous portraiture of local dialects and peculiarities, and thus afford little assistance in the search for a universally applicable rule of guidance. Doctor Holmes, I believe, objects to having the term "medicated" applied to his tales; but surely the adject-

tive is not reproachful; it indicates one of the most charming and also, alas! inimitable features of his work.

Bret Harte is probably as valuable a witness as could be summoned in this case. His touch is realistic, and yet his imagination is poetic and romantic. He has discovered something. He has done something both new and good. Within the space of some fifty pages, he has painted a series of pictures which will last as long as anything in the fifty thousand pages of Dickens. Taking "The Outcasts of Poker Flat" as perhaps the most nearly perfect of the tales, as well as the most truly representative of the writer's powers, let us try to guess its secret. In the first place, it is very short,—a single episode, succinctly and eloquently told. The descriptions of scenery and persons are masterly and memorable. The characters of these persons, their actions, and the circumstances of their lives, are as rugged, as grotesque, as terrible, and also as beautiful, as the scenery. Thus an artistic harmony is established,—the thing which is lacking in so much of our literature. The story moves swiftly on, through humor, pathos, and tragedy, to its dramatic close. It is given with perfect literary taste, and naught in its phases of human nature is either extenuated or set down in malice. The little narrative can be read in a few minutes, and can never be forgotten. But it is only an episode; and it is an episode of an episode,—that of the Californian gold-fever. The story of the Argonauts is only one story, after all, and these tales of Harte's are but so many facets of the same gem. They are not, however, like chapters in a romance; there is no such vital connection between them as develops a cumulative force. We are no more impressed after reading half a dozen of them than after the first; they are variations of the same theme. They discover to us no new truth about human nature; they only show us certain human beings so placed as to act out their naked selves,—to be neither influenced nor protected by the rewards and screens of conventional civilization. The affectation and insincerity of our daily life make such a spectacle fresh and pleasing to us. But we enjoy it because of its unexpectedness, its separateness, its unlikeness to the ordinary course of existence. It is like a huge, strange, gorgeous flower, an exaggeration and intensification of such flowers as we know; but a flower without roots, unique, never to be reproduced. It is fitting that its portrait should be painted; but, once done, it is done with; we cannot fill our

picture-gallery with it. Carlyle wrote the History of the French Revolution, and Bret Harte has written the History of the Argonauts; but it is absurd to suppose that a national literature could be founded on either episode.

But though Mr. Harte has not left his fellow-craftsmen anything to gather from the lode which he opened and exhausted, we may still learn something from his method. He took things as he found them, and he found them disinclined to weave themselves into an elaborate and balanced narrative. He recognized the deficiency of historical perspective, but he saw that what was lost in slowly-growing, culminating power was gained in vivid, instant force. The deeds of his character could not be represented as the final result of long-inherited proclivities; but they could appear between their motive and their consequence, like the draw—aim—fire! of the Western desperado,—as short, sharp, and conclusive. In other words, the conditions of American life, as he saw it, justified a short story, or any number of them, but not a novel; and the fact that he did afterward attempt a novel only served to confirm his original position. I think that the limitation that he discovered is of much wider application than we are prone to realize. American life has been, as yet, nothing but a series of episodes, of experiments. There has been no such thing as a fixed and settled condition of society, not subject to change itself, and therefore affording a foundation and contrast to minor or individual vicissitudes. We cannot write American-grown novels, because a novel is not an episode, nor an aggregation of episodes; we cannot write romances in the Hawthorne sense, because, as yet, we do not seem to be clever enough. Several courses are, however, open to us, and we are pursuing them all. First, we are writing "short stories," accounts of episodes needing no historical perspective, and not caring for any; but so far as one may judge, we write the best short stories in the world. Secondly, we may spin out our short stories into long-short stories, just as we may imagine a baby six feet high; it takes up more room, but is just as much a baby as one of twelve inches. Thirdly, we may graft our flower of romance on a European stem, and enjoy ourselves as much as the European novelists do, and with as clear a conscience. We are stealing that which enriches us and does not impoverish them. It is silly and childish to make the boundaries of the America of

the mind coincide with those of the United States. We need not dispute about free trade and protection here; literature is not commerce, nor is it politics. America is not a petty nationality, like France, England, and Germany; but whatever in such nationalities tends toward enlightenment and freedom is American. Let us not, therefore, confirm ourselves in a false and ignoble conception of our meaning and mission in the world. Let us not carry into the temple of the Muse the jealousies, the prejudice, the ignorance, the selfishness of our "Senate" and "Representatives," strangely so called! Let us not refuse to breathe the air of Heaven, lest there be something European or Asian in it. If we cannot have a national literature in the narrow, geographical sense of the phrase, it is because our inheritance transcends all geographical definitions. The great American novel may not be written this year, or even in this century. Meanwhile, let us not fear to ride, and ride to death, whatever species of Pegasus we can catch. It can do us no harm, and it may help us to acquire a firmer seat against the time when our own, our very own winged steed makes his appearance.

JULIAN HAWTHORNE.